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Analysis in Brief

Wholesale Trade: The Year 2015 in Review

by Indermohan Saini

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| 0 ^s | value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded |
| ^p | preliminary |
| ^r | revised |
| x | suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i> |
| ^E | use with caution |
| F | too unreliable to be published |
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Wholesale Trade: The Year 2015 in Review

By Indermohan Saini

Introduction

Wholesale trade in Canada rose for the sixth consecutive year in 2015, up 3.7%, the result of higher sales in all seven subsectors¹. This measure of wholesale sales includes all industries within the wholesale trade sector as defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), with the exception of oilseed and grain merchant wholesalers (NAICS 41112), petroleum and petroleum products merchant wholesalers (NAICS 412), and business-to-business electronic markets, and agents and brokers (NAICS 419).

Wholesale sales volumes² increased 1.6% in 2015, a slower rate than in 2014, when sales were up 5.8% in current dollars, and 4.0% in constant dollars.

The main contributor to higher wholesale sales in 2015 was the motor vehicle and parts subsector, which grew 7.4%. The gain in this subsector partly reflected higher exports of motor vehicles. Among the other top contributors were the food, beverage and tobacco subsector (+4.0%), the personal and household goods subsector (+5.4%) and the miscellaneous subsector (+5.9%).

In 2015, higher sales were recorded in nine provinces, together accounting for 88% of total wholesale sales. Ontario contributed the most to the increase in dollar terms, up 6.5% on the strength of widespread gains across subsectors, led by the motor vehicle and parts subsector. Alberta reported the sole provincial decline in 2015, ending five consecutive annual gains. The decline was led by lower sales in the machinery, equipment and supplies subsector, which reflected lower investment in the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction sector.

The wholesale trade sector accounted for 5.8% of Canada's real gross domestic product³ (GDP) in 2015. Between 2010 and 2015, this sector, as measured by GDP, grew at roughly twice the rate of the Canadian economy, making it the fastest growing of all major sectors during this period.

In terms of employment, the average number of employees⁴ in the wholesale trade sector increased 0.5% to 782,981 employees in 2015. Average weekly earnings (including overtime)⁵ of people employed by wholesalers grew 4.9% to an average of \$1,164 per week in 2015. This was higher than 2014, when average wages grew 2.9% to \$1,109 per week.

In the wholesale trade sector, Canadian business had 60,184 active locations with employees⁶ in 2015. Excluding the oilseed and grain industry, the petroleum and petroleum product subsector and the business-to-business electronic markets and agents and brokers subsector, there were 54,279 active locations with employees in the wholesale trade sector.

Labour productivity⁷, or output per hour worked, in the wholesale trade sector edged down 0.1% in 2015. Both the output (+0.7%) and hours worked (+0.8%) in the wholesale trade sector increased at a similar pace in 2015.

¹ All data in this release are expressed in current dollars, unless otherwise noted.

² Total wholesale sales expressed in volume are calculated by deflating current dollar values using relevant price indexes. The wholesale sales series in chained (2007) dollars is a chained Fisher volume index with 2007 as the reference year. For more information, see [Sales in volume for Wholesale Trade](#).

³ Statistics Canada. *Table 379-0031 - Gross domestic product (GDP) at basic prices, by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), monthly (dollars), CANSIM (database)*

⁴ Statistics Canada. *Table 281-0024 - Survey of Employment, Payrolls and Hours (SEPH), employment by type of employee and detailed North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), annual (persons), CANSIM (database)*.

⁵ Statistics Canada. *Table 281-0063 - Survey of Employment, Payrolls and Hours (SEPH), employment and average weekly earnings (including overtime) for all employees by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), seasonally adjusted, monthly (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database)*.

⁶ Statistics Canada. *Table 552-0003 - Canadian business counts, locations with employees, by employment size and North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), Canada and provinces, December 2015, semi-annual (number)*

⁷ Statistics Canada. *Table 383-0012 - Indexes of labour productivity and related variables, by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), seasonally adjusted, quarterly (index, 2007=100), CANSIM (database)*.

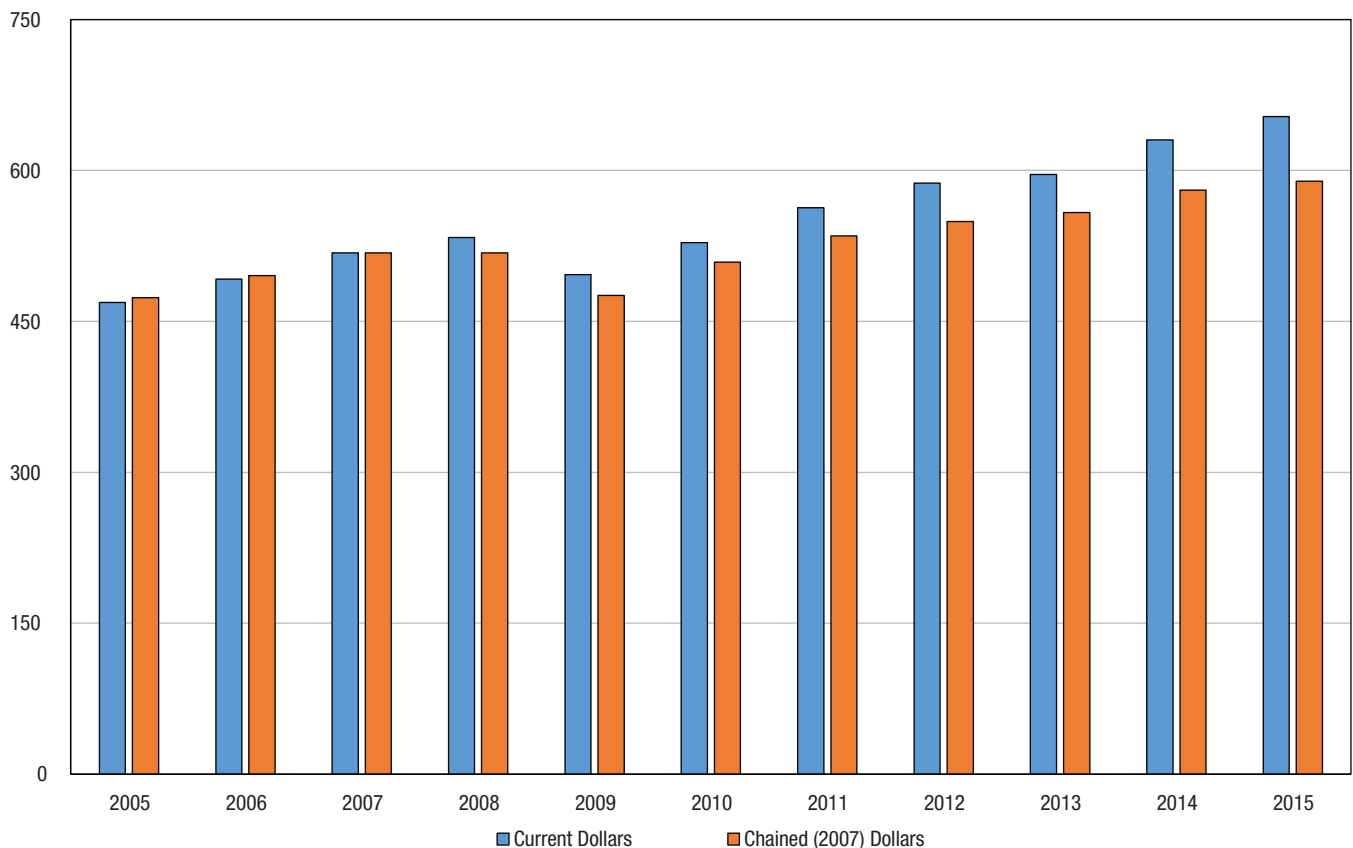
Wholesale trade sector in 2015

Annualized Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey (MWTS) data indicates that the wholesale trade sector expanded for the sixth consecutive year in 2015, up 3.7% to \$653.7 billion, as a result of higher sales in all subsectors. After decreasing 6.9% in 2009, the largest annual decline on record for the series, wholesale sales recovered to their pre-recession peak⁸ in 2010. In 2015, wholesale sales were 26.2% higher than in 2007.

In volume terms, wholesale sales were up 1.6% to \$589.4 billion in 2015. Still in 2015, the volume of wholesale sales was 13.8% higher than in 2007.

Chart 1
Wholesale Sales, 2005 to 2015

\$ billions



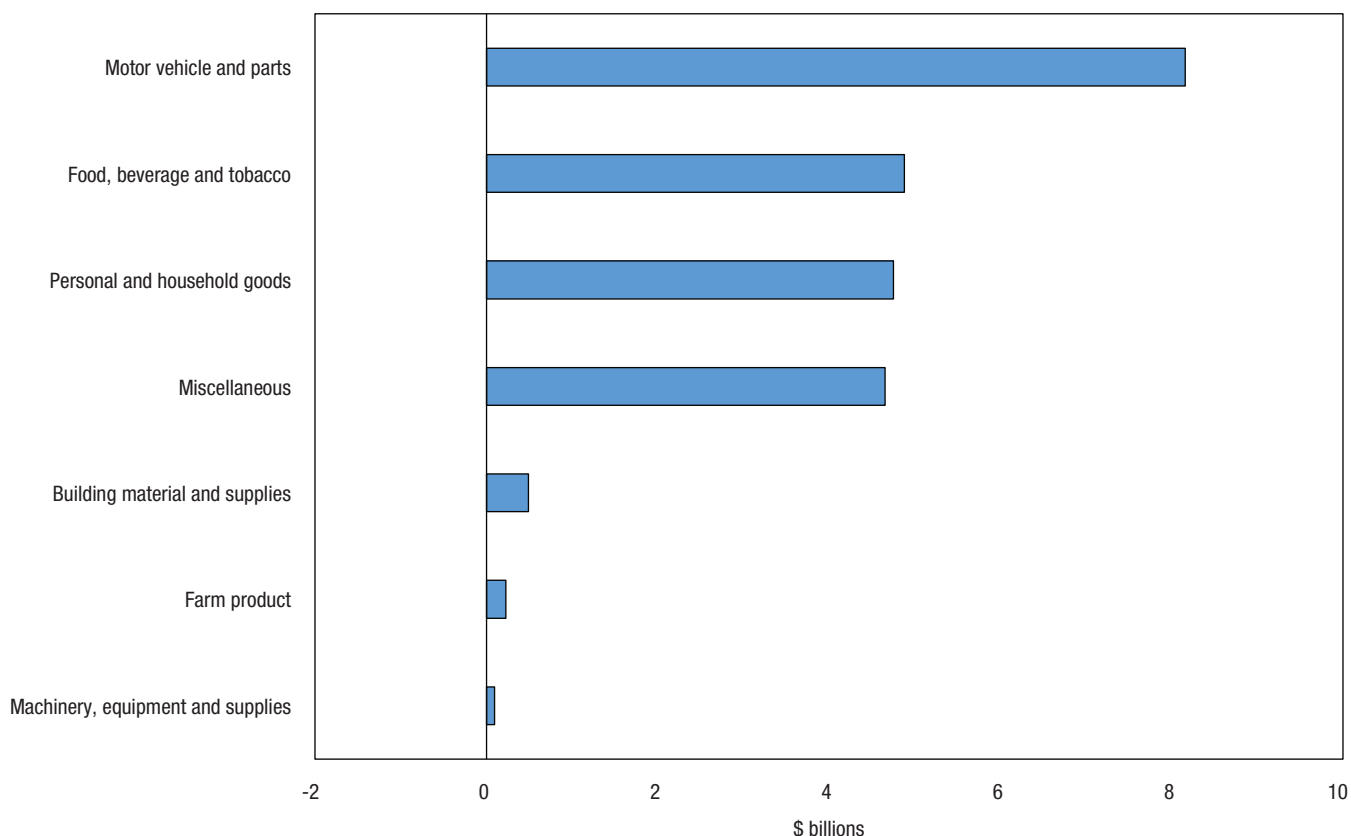
Sources: Statistics Canada, CANSIM tables 081-0011 and 081-0015.

⁸ In the context of annualized data, the year 2007 is considered the pre-recession benchmark year for the purpose of this paper since the recession started in late 2008. For analysis of data aggregated quarterly, the monthly pre-recession benchmark is the third quarter of 2008.

Higher sales in all subsectors

All subsectors recorded gains in 2015. The motor vehicle and parts subsector, the food, beverage and tobacco subsector, the personal and household goods subsector and the miscellaneous subsector, together accounting for 64% of total sales, contributed most to the gain.

Chart 2
Wholesale sales by subsector, dollar change from 2014



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 081-0011.

Motor vehicle and parts led the growth in 2015

In 2015, the motor vehicle and parts subsector recorded the largest increase in sales, rising 7.4% to \$118.7 billion. Excluding this subsector, wholesale sales rose 2.9% in 2015. The share of wholesale sales⁹ held by the motor vehicle and parts subsector has declined since 2005, decreasing from 19.5% in 2005 to a low of 15.3% in 2009, before rebounding to 18.2% in 2015.

Two of the three industries in the motor vehicle and parts subsector reported gains in 2015. The motor vehicle industry led the gain, increasing 8.5% to \$88.7 billion, its sixth consecutive annual increase. The new motor vehicle parts and accessories industry grew 4.5% to \$29.5 billion. The used motor vehicle parts and accessories industry declined 8.1% to \$594 million in 2015.

Many wholesalers are involved in facilitating international trade by importing and exporting goods. In particular, a large number of motor vehicles and motor vehicle parts are imported and exported by Canadian wholesalers. In 2015, both exports (+17.2 %) and imports (+11.0%) of motor vehicles and parts increased. Retail sales by motor vehicle and parts dealers, and sales by motor vehicle assembly plants also recorded gains in 2015. Retail sales by

⁹ For share of total wholesale, "total" here refers to total sales recorded by the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey.

motor vehicle and parts dealers recovered to their pre-recession high by 2011, while wholesale sales and imports of motor vehicle and parts recovered to their pre-recession peaks by 2012. In contrast, exports of motor vehicle and parts and manufacturing sales of motor vehicles did not recover to their pre-recession peaks until 2015.

Growth in the food, beverage and tobacco subsector

The food, beverage and tobacco subsector increased 4.0% to \$125.7 billion in 2015. Two of the subsector's three industries contributed to the gain, led by the food industry (+4.3%). The food, beverage and tobacco subsector accounted for 19.2% of total wholesale sales in 2015, up from 17.3% in 2008. In contrast to other subsectors, the food, beverage and tobacco subsector did not record a decrease in sales in either 2008 or 2009. The gain recorded by this subsector in 2009 was led by the food industry (+5.2%) and the cigarette and tobacco product industry (+22.7%).

Sales by supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) retail stores (+1.4%) and food manufacturers (+2.9%), as well as imports (+13.0%) and exports (+15.0%) of food, beverage and tobacco products, all reported gains in 2015. As with sales by food industry wholesalers, these indicators (excluding exports) reported annual gains during the 2008/2009 recession. Increases in these indicators are closely tied to growth in the estimated Canadian population which was up 1.2% in 2009.

The increase in the food industry is also partly reflected by higher food prices. The Industrial Product Price Index for meat, fish, and dairy products (+5.1%) recorded a gain in 2015. The Consumer Price Index for food also reported a gain, up 3.7% on an annual average basis in 2015. Depreciation of the Canadian dollar also contributed to higher food prices.

Miscellaneous subsector: agriculture supplies up, recyclable materials down

The miscellaneous subsector grew for the second time in four years, up 5.9% over 2014 to \$84.0 billion in 2015. The subsector posted gains in four of its five industries, with the agricultural supplies industry leading the gain, advancing 15.2% to \$25.6 billion. Wholesalers in this industry are involved in exporting fertilizers and other chemicals. In 2015, exports of fertilizer, pesticides and other chemical products increased 10.0%.

The recyclable material industry posted its third decline in four years, down 14.1% to \$8.1 billion. This followed a 28.8% gain in 2014. The downward trend coincided with weaker exports of recyclable waste and scrap (-12.2%), and lower prices for scrap metal. Specifically, the Raw Material Price Index for waste and scrap of metal declined 10.1% in 2015.

Gains in other subsectors

Sales in the personal and household goods subsector increased 5.4% to \$92.4 billion in 2015, its third consecutive annual gain. Higher sales were reported in all industries. The gain was mainly attributable to the pharmaceutical and pharmacy supplies industry, which increased 7.0% to \$48.0 billion in 2015. This increase in wholesale sales was consistent with results at the retail level where, according to the Quarterly Retail Commodity Survey, sales of prescription drugs grew 3.5% on an annual basis in 2015, after rising 1.1% in 2014.

The building material and supplies subsector rose 0.5% to \$90.7 billion in 2015. A gain in the lumber, millwork, hardware and other building supplies industry contributed the most to the increase, as the industry grew 7.0% to \$44.5 billion in 2015. Related indicators including housing starts¹⁰ in Canada (+5.7%), and exports (+11.4 %) and imports (+6.3%) of building and packaging materials, also increased in 2015. Growth in the lumber, millwork, hardware and other building supplies industry was partially offset by the decline in the metal service centres industry, which was down 13.1% to \$17.2 billion in 2015. The decline more than offset an 8.6% increase in 2014. The decrease was partly the result of lower metal prices, and a drop in capital spending in the oil and gas industry. The Raw Material Price Index for metal ores, concentrates and scrap fell 5.6% (a fourth consecutive annual decline), and capital spending¹¹ on oil and gas and mineral exploration decreased 24.5% in 2015¹².

¹⁰ This is non-Statistics Canada information. Table 027-0001 - Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, housing starts, under construction and completions in centres 10,000 and over, Canada, provinces, selected census metropolitan areas (Percentage Change (period-to-period), annual (units), CANSIM (database).

¹¹ Statistics Canada. Table 029-0051 - Capital expenditures on intellectual property products, by type of asset, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (dollars), CANSIM (database).

¹² The data used for the Capital and Repair Expenditures are preliminary actuals for 2015.

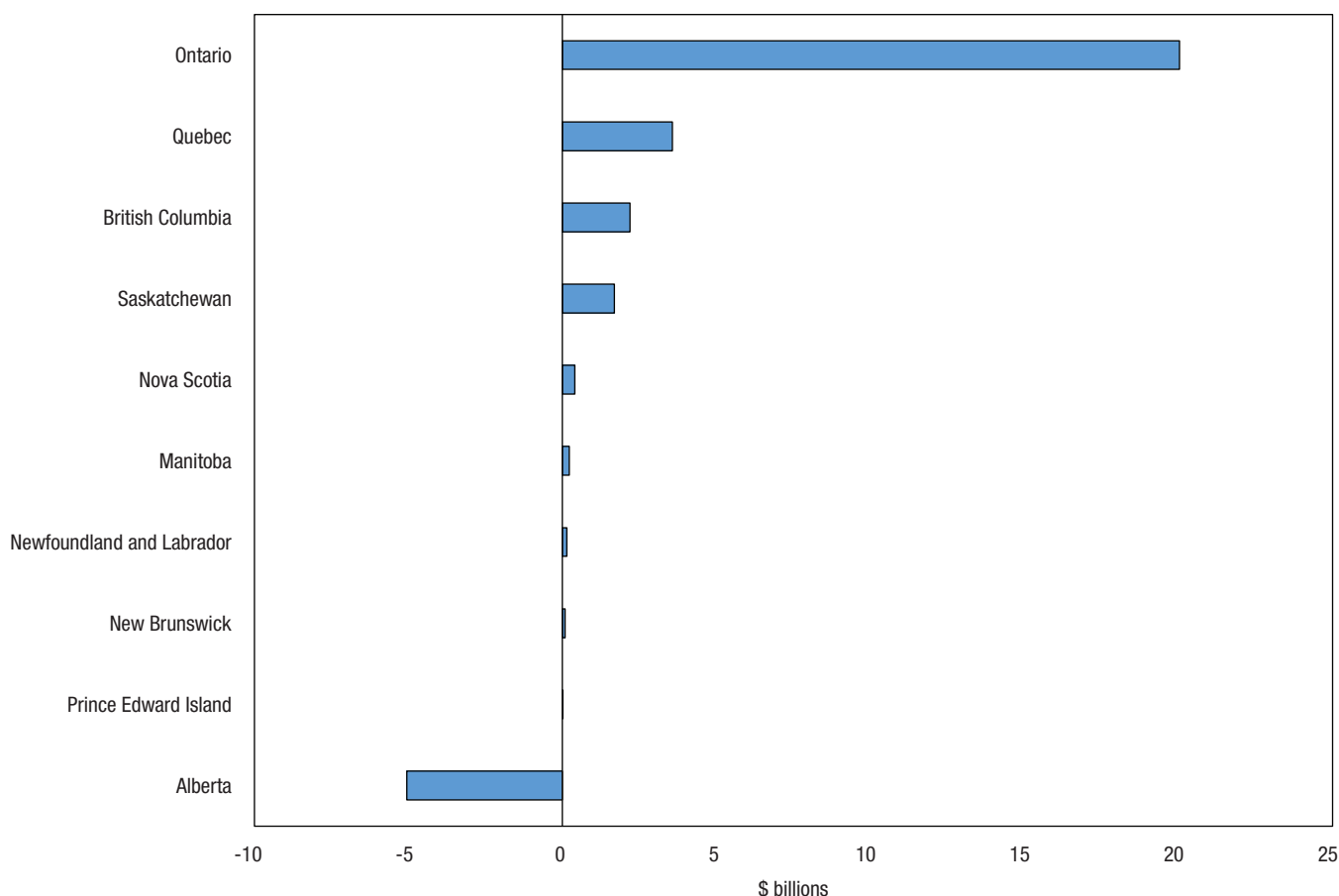
The machinery equipment and supplies subsector, which represented the largest share (20.4%) of total wholesale sales in 2015, edged up 0.1% to \$133.6 billion, its slowest annual growth rate in sales in six years. Gains in the computer and communications equipment and supplies industry (+3.0%) and the other machinery, equipment and supplies industry (+3.4 %) were partially offset by a decline in the construction, forestry, mining, and industrial machinery, equipment and supplies industry (-4.6%). This subsector is sensitive to changes in business investment, particularly investment in machinery. In 2015, capital spending in the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction sector¹³ declined 31.4%, following a 7.8% increase in 2014.

The farm product subsector grew 2.7% to \$ 8.6 billion in 2015, its third consecutive annual gain. This subsector recovered to its pre-recession peak in 2010. In 2015, sales in this subsector were 43.7% above the pre-recession peak of 2007.

Nine provinces posted gains in 2015

In 2015, wholesale sales increased in all provinces, with the exception of Alberta. Ontario was responsible for most of the national gain and half of total sales in 2015. Sales in Ontario increased 6.5% to \$326.8 billion on the strength of widespread gains, led by the motor vehicle and parts subsector (+10.2%) and the personal and household goods subsector (+7.9%).

Chart 3
Wholesale sales by provinces, dollar change from 2014



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 081-0011.

¹³ Statistics Canada. *Table 029-0045 - Capital and repair expenditures, by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), Canada, provinces and territories, annual (dollars)*, CANSIM (database).

Wholesale sales in Quebec increased for the sixth consecutive year, up 3.1% to \$118.6 billion. The machinery, equipment and supplies subsector (+7.4%) and the food, beverage and tobacco subsector (+4.7%) led the gains.

Sales in British Columbia increased by 3.6% in 2015 to \$62.5 billion, following a 6.2% gain in 2014. With the exception of the miscellaneous subsector, all subsectors posted higher sales, led by the food, beverage and tobacco subsector (+8.2%).

In 2015, sales in Saskatchewan increased 6.8% to \$26.5 billion, and sales in Manitoba rose 1.3% to \$17.3 billion. The agricultural supplies industry in the miscellaneous subsector led the gains in both provinces.

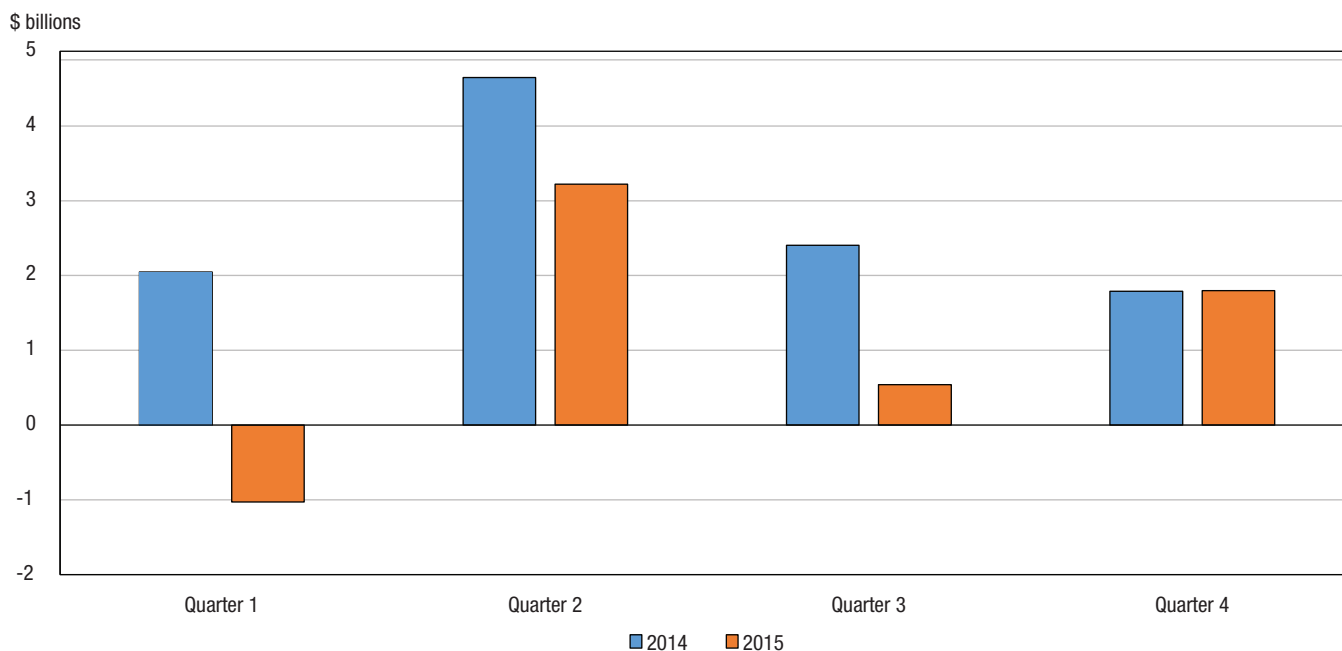
In the Atlantic Provinces, higher sales in the food, beverage and tobacco subsector led the gains in Nova Scotia, where sales increased 4.6% to \$9.2 billion, and in Newfoundland and Labrador, where sales increased 2.9% to \$5.2 billion. Higher sales in both New Brunswick, up 1.4% to \$6.2 billion, and Prince Edward Island, up 2.0% to \$701 million, were led by gains in the machinery, equipment and supplies subsector.

Following five consecutive annual gains, Alberta recorded the sole decline among the provinces in 2015, down 6.0% to \$79.8 billion. The machinery, equipment and supplies subsector (-13.2%) was the largest contributor to the decline in the province in 2015, led by the construction, forestry, mining, and industrial machinery, equipment and supplies industry. The decline in this industry in Alberta coincided with a downturn in oil and gas prices starting in the fourth quarter of 2014. Capital spending in Alberta's mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction sector fell in 2015, down 36.4%, following an 11.0% gain in 2014. The building materials and supplies subsector (-8.5%) and the motor vehicle and parts subsector (-12.8%) also contributed to the province's decline.

Quarterly and monthly trends in wholesale in 2015

Growth in wholesale trade in 2015 was driven mainly by growth in the second quarter¹⁴ (+2.0%) and the fourth quarter (+1.1%). This contrasts with 2014, when all four quarters recorded growth. The gains in 2015 were partially offset by 0.6% decline in the first quarter. This decline in the first quarter was the result of a 2.7% drop in January, which was the largest monthly decline since January 2009.

Chart 4
Change in total wholesale sales by quarter, 2014 and 2015



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 081-0011.

¹⁴ All quarterly and monthly wholesale sales are derived from seasonal adjusted data (CANSIM 081-0011 and CANSIM 081-0015).

The motor vehicle and parts subsector led the decline in the first quarter. Excluding this subsector, wholesale sales increased 0.3% in the first quarter. The decrease in this subsector was primarily the result of lower sales in the motor vehicle industry in January. The decline in this subsector coincided with closure of several automotive assembly plants for retooling and severe weather conditions which disrupted the flow of many goods.

Wholesale sales increased 2.0% in the second quarter of 2015, led by a gain in the motor vehicle and parts subsector (+11.6%). The motor vehicle industry, which recorded a notable gain in April (+14.3%), contributed the most to the subsector's gain in the second quarter. Excluding this subsector, wholesale sales remained flat for the same period. In dollar terms, the miscellaneous subsector (-1.7%) recorded the largest decline, led by the agricultural supplies industry (-3.7%) and the recyclable material industry (-8.4%). These two industries recorded large declines in May, which drove the second quarter results. For the agricultural supplies industry this was the lowest level since November 2014, and for the recyclable material industry this was the lowest level since November 2013. Sales for the recyclable material industry declined for six consecutive months starting in December 2014, which partially reflected the falling oil prices, which began in late 2014.

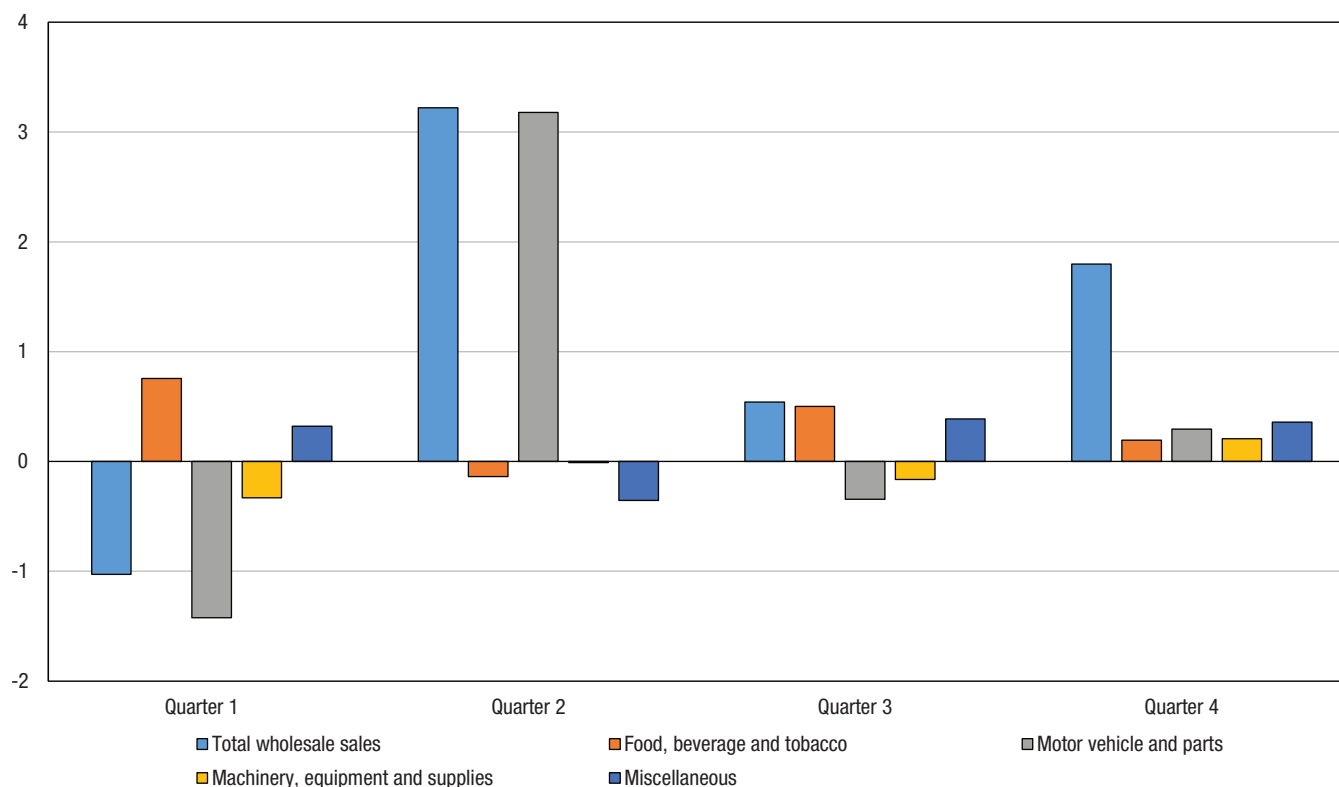
Quarterly sales were up 0.3% in the third quarter of 2015. Higher sales were recorded in three of seven subsectors, led by higher sales in the food, beverage and tobacco subsector (+1.6%). The advance in this subsector was result of a new record level for sales in the food industry in September 2015. The miscellaneous subsector (+1.9%) also contributed to the growth in the third quarter, primarily the result of gains in the agricultural supplies industry (+6.5%).

Wholesale sale rose 1.1% in the fourth quarter, on the strength of higher sales in all subsectors. The building material and supplies subsector (+1.6%) and the miscellaneous subsector (+1.7%) led the gains in the fourth quarter of 2015. The building material and supplies subsector grew on the strength of higher sales in the electrical, plumbing, heating and air-conditioning equipment and supplies industry (+4.4%). This industry recorded notable gain in December 2015 (+11.2%), after reaching its highest level on record in December 2014 (+18.1%). In the miscellaneous subsector, the agricultural supplies industry (+4.6%) and the other miscellaneous industry¹⁵ (+4.9%) led the gain. Both industries reported higher sales in November 2015. For the agricultural supplies industry, this was its highest level since December 2014, and for the other miscellaneous industry, it reached its highest level since October 2011.

¹⁵ This industry comprises establishments, not classified to any other industry group, primarily engaged in wholesaling logs, wood chips, minerals, ores and concentrates, precious metals, second-hand goods and other products.

Chart 5
Change in sale by quarter in 2015, total wholesale sales and key indicators

\$ billions



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 081-0011.

Conclusion

Growth in wholesale sales in both current and constant dollars was slower in 2015 compared to that in 2014. A weak first quarter was offset by gains in the last three quarters of 2015. The motor vehicle and parts subsector, the food, beverage and tobacco subsector, the personal and household goods subsector and the miscellaneous subsector accounted for 64% of the overall increase in 2015. At the provincial level, Ontario posted the largest gain, led by the motor vehicle and parts subsector. In contrast, Alberta posted the sole provincial decrease in wholesale sales in 2015, led by a decline in the machinery equipment and supplies subsector. Declining oil prices in 2015 led to lower investments in the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction sector, which contributed to the decline in wholesale sales for the machinery, equipment and supplies subsector.

Appendix

Table 1
Wholesale merchants' sales by industry

	Sales		Annual Growth rate
	2014	2015	
	\$ millions		
			% change
Total, wholesale sales (current dollars)	630,461	653,717	3.7
Total, wholesale sales (2007 chained dollars)	580,297	589,352	1.6
Total wholesale sales (current dollars), excluding motor vehicle and parts	519,883	534,983	2.9
Farm product	8,394	8,621	2.7
Food, beverage and tobacco	120,806	125,685	4.0
Food	108,751	113,432	4.3
Beverage	5,861	6,292	7.4
Cigarette and tobacco product	6,195	5,960	-3.8
Personal and household goods	87,669	92,421	5.4
Textile, clothing and footwear	11,379	11,597	1.9
Home entertainment equipment and household appliance	8,694	9,130	5.0
Home furnishings	6,019	6,312	4.9
Personal goods	8,644	9,201	6.4
Pharmaceuticals and pharmacy supplies	44,851	47,968	7.0
Toiletries, cosmetics and sundries	8,083	8,213	1.6
Motor vehicle and parts	110,578	118,734	7.4
Motor vehicle	81,732	88,683	8.5
New motor vehicle parts and accessories	28,200	29,457	4.5
Used motor vehicle parts and accessories	646	594	-8.1
Building material and supplies	90,168	90,659	0.5
Electrical, plumbing, heating and air-conditioning equipment and supplies	28,820	28,976	0.5
Metal service centres	19,739	17,160	-13.1
Lumber, millwork, hardware and other building supplies	41,609	44,524	7.0
Machinery, equipment and supplies	133,506	133,601	0.1
Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment	16,000	15,917	-0.5
Construction, forestry, mining, and industrial machinery, equipment and supplies	45,871	43,781	-4.6
Computer and communications equipment and supplies	42,205	43,476	3.0
Other machinery, equipment and supplies	29,430	30,427	3.4
Miscellaneous	79,340	83,995	5.9
Recyclable material	9,462	8,126	-14.1
Paper, paper product and disposable plastic product	11,059	11,802	6.7
Agricultural supplies	22,195	25,574	15.2
Chemical (except agricultural) and allied product	14,481	15,396	6.3
Other miscellaneous	22,143	23,097	4.3

Note: Figures may not add up to total due to rounding.

Sources: CANSIM table 081-0011 and 081-0015

Table 2
Wholesale merchants' sales by province and territory

	Sales		Annual Growth rate
	2014	2015	
	\$ millions		% change
Canada	630,461	653,717	3.7
Newfoundland and Labrador	5,071	5,219	2.9
Prince Edward Island	687	701	2.0
Nova Scotia	8,824	9,231	4.6
New Brunswick	6,162	6,248	1.4
Quebec	115,015	118,586	3.1
Ontario	306,756	326,783	6.5
Manitoba	17,031	17,254	1.3
Saskatchewan	24,851	26,535	6.8
Alberta	84,856	79,801	-6.0
British Columbia	60,328	62,522	3.6
Yukon	124	125	0.8
Northwest Territories	690	645	-6.5
Nunavut	68	68	-0.1

Note: Figures may not add up to total due to rounding.

Source: CANSIM table 081-0011